2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti
Congo-Kinshasa FO1



Mbuti creations. But however much they enlarge upon the power and horror of the evil spirits, they always show that the Mbuti are not without power themselves, and the spirits are every now and again defeated and killed by Mbuti trickery. This confirms the village belief that the Mbuti are in fact in league with the spirits; just the fact that they coexist in the same forest is cited by many villagers as evidence of their affinity.

I cite two legends here (the KiBira versions of the same legends told by the same Mbuti are given in Appendix I[1], both of which show Mbuti ambivalence at its height. The first describes an Mbuti band in a village context (in a plantation) and pointedly refers to a myth that the Mbuti had bananas before the villagers. This is not generally believed to be true, but it is a way of expressing the undoubted prior occupation and ownership of the forest by the Mbuti. In this legend the Mbuti are threatened by a quasi-real enemy, the elephant. Elephants are indeed destructive to plantations and sometimes to Mbuti camps, but here, as seen at the end, the elephant is also a symbol for the villager (who is also destructive in his act of cutting down the forest). To rid themselves of the elephantine menace the Mbuti invent a story about evil spirits, making use of the knowledge that the elephant is basically stupid. When describing the elephant's fear of the spirits, the narrator comments, "Their fear was empty" ("*bachei ba bo*"), "for elephants are like villagers" ("*bambongu bua sopila-batu*"). The legend significantly ends with the promise that the narrator and his family will live happily forever after, but for "happily" the word *kobia* (more often, *ekimi*) is used. It means "quietly."

## LEGEND OF THE MBUTI PLANTATION

In olden times we Mbuti had bananas before the people of the village. The people of the village stole bananas from us. We shared together, we Mbuti taking the leaves and the villagers taking the roots. They tricked us this way.

Our plantations of old were good, but the elephants used to bother us a lot. They killed many plantations. The Mbuti said, "What shall we do? The elephants are bothering us so much and are killing our plantations."

An old man, very old indeed, said, "When the elephants come again, we shall talk with them." The youths said, "What will you say?" The old man replied, "You shall see, children."

[1] [see page 301 -- Analyst]

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti



539 186 825 245 The elephants came. They began to kill all the bananas. They began to completely kill the plantation. The youths ran to the old man and said, "Oh, Father, the elephants have come again and are killing our plantation." [The old man said], "Good, I shall go and chat with them. All of you stay here, completely quiet."

The old man went to the plantation. He cried and cried. He threw himself on the ground. The elephants looked at him and said, "What thing is this? The youths have not come to chase us away, only an old Mbuti and he just cries. It is good, we shall eat quietly."

They ate many bananas, and the youths remained completely quiet in the camp. The old man cried greatly, "Oh, my children, all are dead. Oh, my children, where are they?"

The elephants heard, and said to the old man, "Why are you crying like that? And where are the youths? We shall eat up all the plantation." The old man replied, "Eat, eat it all. My children are all dead." And he continued crying.

539 186 825 245 776 The elephants said, "But you have many children. How did they die?" The old man said, "It was an evil spirit, very evil indeed. He walked with two spears.[1] He was very fat, like you. Every day I sent someone to cut bananas and the evil spirit ate him. Now he has eaten all my children. He said it was his plantation and that he would kill everyone who came here. Oh, my children have all died emptily. Why did the evil spirit not bother some other plantation, why did he curse mine?" He cried greatly and he left.

The elephants said, "Ha! If a spirit that bad has cursed this plantation, we should go somewhere else. Let us go quickly, before he kills us!"

Because elephants are like people of the village, and they are afraid of evil spirits. But they are afraid emptily. They went far. The old man called all his children and said, "Now the elephants will not come back. They think this is a place full of bad spirits. Thus we shall remain quiet. It is our plantation. Nobody else will bother us."

539 186 825 Although the scene is the plantation, thus asserting their claim to the plantations of the villagers, the Mbuti plainly are really referring

965 [1] Evidently a feature that to the Mbuti conveys a real fear of or respect for the supernatural, for in the morning ritual purging of the molimo, in its role as judge and when seeking Mbuti who are committing the crime of sleeping during the singing, the hunter acting the part carries a spear under each arm. See also in the second legend cited, where a spirit wanders through the night with two firebrands, which is the way in which the entrance of the molimo trumpet into the camp is often marked.

[P308]

# THE LEGEND OF THE MBUTI PLANTATION

539 875 186 245

*musu banu bambuti mbuu'ini eboko. musu mu batu bonji.*
In olden times we Mbuti had bananas, before the people of the village.

*batu bonji baku bini eboko ndesu. su kongio'i.*
The people of the village stole the bananas from us. We shared them.

*banu bambuti mkonio ekasu, bakpare bua'i poko. Seyumu mayoli bendo.*
We Mbuti took the leaves, the *kpare* took the roots. That was their trickery.

539 825 186

*sombo ndamo nda musu bindamba. ekini bombongu pikini dongusu.*
Our plantations of old were good. But the elephants came and troubled us.

*bamdongia'imi. bo bumia'i tiko su.*
They troubled us. They killed our plantations.

*bambuti bolofa'i, "su asmabo? bombongu banu dongibi, bobumisu tiko ndamu."*
The Mbuti said, "What shall we do? The elephants trouble us so and are killing our plantations."

*mangesi, mangesi mangbo, alofa'i, "bombongu bapiki su lofua nabi."*
An elder, a very old man indeed, said, "When the elephants come again, we shall talk with them."

*bachahwa bolofa'i, "su asmabo?" mangesi a lofa'i, "su sipa, bamiki."*
The youths said, "What will you say?" The old man said, "You wait, children."

*bombongu bakidi. bawanji a lea'eboko bokbu. bo wanjia'i banu tiko.*
The elephants came. They began to eat the bananas. They began to destroy the plantation.

*bachahwa bachi'i aka mangesi, bolofua'i, "ombo, epa, bombongu bidi; bo bumia tiko ndamu."*
The youths were afraid and ran to the old man, saying, "Oh! Father, the elephants have come; they are destroying our plantation."

*"ndamu. me musu ko totiambino, beningbokbu mu likusu; nakobi amemugo."*
*mangesi a ko d'i na tiko.*
"Good. I shall go to chat with them. All of you stay here, completely quiet."
The old man went to the plantation.

3c Turnbull E-6 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti



circumstances he could not have foreseen or he would not have been so cheerful. 177

For the first few days I went out with Kenge and others to the new "Pygmy plantation," to collect the poles and saplings for my house. The plantation was a chaotic tangle of fallen, broken, splintered wood. The Pygmies, armed only with their small honey axes, and a few bigger blades borrowed or stolen from the Negroes, had chopped the smaller trees down at about shoulder height, or rather less. The bigger trees they had attacked higher up, working from a flimsy frame from which they gnawed with their tiny hatchets like rats until a hundred and fifty feet of timber came crashing down. They had evidently caught on to the idea that if they attacked the big trees first, those, as they fell, would bring down a number of smaller ones, saving that much work. The result was that even they found it difficult to pick their way among the debris, and they had no means of clearing it. None the less, they had hopefully thrown down banana stems here and there, hoping for them to take root. Njobo proudly showed me one he had "planted," which was struggling manfully to raise its withered leaves above the debris into the sunshine. The only clearing had been done by Negroes, like myself in search of building materials. Evidently the Pygmies' enthusiasm for their plantation had not carried them very far. 313 [123] [412] 313 245

The building of my house followed much the same pattern that characterizes every Pygmy endeavor outside the forest world. It began with a lot of noise and big ideas. Their own camp was built in the manner of a Negro village, mud huts in two lines facing each other. The huts were only about seven feet long and five feet deep, some without roofs, some without walls, none of them really complete. Larger families joined two houses together. Only Ekianga's was different, as might be expected. His house stood at the far end and ran across between the two lines, facing down the middle. It was about twenty feet long and had a fine wooden door that opened and 342 [361] 342 184